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MOTHER'S CALL

Continued from page 6

foursome. Why won't you come along?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said the girl, with crimson cheeks. She cast down her brown eyes and talked fast. "You'll howl, I know, but I'll tell you the straight of it. Yesterday I wanted to go, as you know, but you also know what our mothers would say to it, if they knew." One girl mewed. Another coughed.

"All right! You can sneer if you want to. But listen. This morning about eleven o'clock I was packing my suit-case to go with you, when suddenly my mother's face came before me just like that. I can see her in a navy-blue cloth suit with a big hat and her veil blowing back, and she said, just as clearly as I am speaking now: 'Iris! Iris!' And it knocked me flat—the look in her eyes and all—and I just dumped my glad rags out onto the floor and stood up and shook my fist at myself in the glass—and there you are!"

"What's the matter, Babe?" "I saw her!" whispered Babe. "She followed Jack and me to Yonkers. She was dressed just as Iris says, and we thought she looked like you, Iris. She looked as though she had been crying."

"Crying?" cried Iris. "Why, what could she have been doing at Yonkers?" "Maybe," said Babe timidly, "maybe she overheard what we were saying."

"Oh, no, she couldn't," said Iris. "It must have been somebody else you saw. But anyhow she has been calling me all day, and I'm going to her. That's all." There was a short silence. Then the girls looked at each other.

"I'll go home too. Let's all go!" said Gladys Schermerhorn. "Babe, you wire the boys that it's all off."

Babe whimpered. "It's all right to go home, she said—I'll go too—but it'll cost me five pounds of chocolates. Jack bet me that Iris wouldn't go."

Iris blushed crimson. "Did he?" she said. "Buy the candy, Babe, and I'll pay half of it, if you'll never let him know."

*

At half-past three o'clock Mrs. Chester was in her room staring at the little gilt clock which ticked away on her dressing-table. She did not realize it, but her face was strained and white and her clenched hands were cold and trembling.

The clock struck the half-hour, and she rose and went to the window. Every cab which came in sight she watched with a sickening anxiety. Once she saw a suit-case on top of a cab and a gray dress within. Her heart gave a bound; but the cab rattled on, passed her door and was lost to sight. Twenty minutes to four! Perhaps there were no cabs. She would give Iris until four.

Her heart beat so that her dress moved. At half-past four she was still standing at the window. Five o'clock, and she had not moved except to consult a timetable in her hand. Two more trains were now in. Iris might have come on either.

Her fears were agonizing, but still she could not think of Iris on this mad escape. There was some other reason for the delay. Her mother's heart trusted in a pair of steady brown eyes with long black lashes and a tender yet resolute mouth. Her baby girl had never yet refused to meet her mother's gaze, and she was not failing her now. Tears gathered and fell unresistingly on the lace of her gown, yet her courage and faith never faltered. Iris was her own daughter. Iris would be true—she felt it. Six o'clock! It was too dark to see, but there was a sound of wheels before the door.

She walked quickly down-stairs and passed the butler in the hall. "I will go, Parsons," she said. "It is my daughter. I wish to see her alone."

The man bowed and withdrew. She answered the sharp ring herself and looked into her daughter's eyes.

"Oh, mother, mother!" cried the girl, dropping her suit-case in the vestibule and flinging her arms around her mother's neck. "You have been calling me all day, and that is why I came!"

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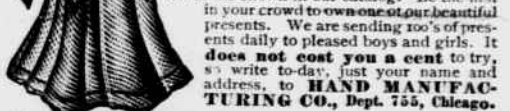


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